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Agencies band to help with expected boom

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In an historic partnership between USDA Rural Development and Fort Riley, both federal agencies have agreed to cooperate in assisting military and civilian personnel who will be locating to Fort Riley and the surrounding communities.

More than 70 representatives of government agencies, local government, builders, bankers, developer, real estate agents and others attended the first of four area USDA/Fort Riley Regional Initiative meetings, this one held at the EMS Academy in Clay Center.

Representatives from the USDA Rural Development office, U.S. Senator Pat Roberts' office, Fort Riley, and financial institutions gave round robin presentations on the different loan and grant programs available to communities, individuals, and businesses around the region.

USDA Rural Development State Director Chuck Banks said, "This is an opportunity to see the population in-migration. We expect to see a significant demand in housing, infrastructure, and business development in the region."



Officials, bankers, developers meet to plan for coming of Ft. Riley Soldiers and families to area

At a time when most Kansas counties are experiencing the results of gradual, long-term population loss, the Fort Riley Regional Initiative will bring more than 7500 soldiers and families to the region.

The USDA has allocated \$25 million in guaranteed housing loan funding targeted toward the region.

Harold Stone, a representative of Sen. Pat Roberts, said, "It is important for communities and individuals to remember that this is the new Army. Their educational and technical skills are very high. Recent Army policies on relocation have changed. Soldiers will be much more stable, and not constantly on the move. This is an great opportunity for communities located within an easy commute of Fort Riley,"

In addition to home loans, a multitude of guaranteed loans, direct loans, and grant programs are available to help communities and businesses grow. Loans are available to develop infrastructure, including construction of water lines, sewer lines, fire stations, streets, detention centers, and hospitals.

Gary Smith of the USDA said that outlying communities need to focus on what the community wants to do.

"Cities such as Clay Center should look at housing availability for the military families moving into the area now, then consider those families that might consider retirement opportunities in Clay Center, and soldiers making secondary moves," Smith said.

"If Clay Center wants to grow, it needs to look at all of the resources: child care, community halls, recreation. You can't do it all, so you need to look at first needs first. Start improvements now, and make what you have better, stronger, and quicker," Smith said.

Banks said the USDA is trying to secure additional dollars to fund water and community facility construction.

"Infrastructure takes longer to put in place than housing," Smith said.